

## **Southern Sudan on the Eve of Self-Determination**

Director of Ceremonies,  
President Abdulsalami Abubaker  
President Pierre Buyoya,  
Students and staff of the University of Juba,  
Members of Southern Sudan civil society,  
Your Excellencies Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic  
corps,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan I would like to thank the University of Juba and the Southern Sudan civil society coalition for giving us the opportunity to address this important gathering today.

When the Panel was constituted in October 2009, at the conclusion of our work as the AU Panel on Darfur, the Peace and Security Council said our mandate was to work with the Government and people of Sudan (i) to pursue policies it had adopted focused on the resolution of the conflict in Darfur, (ii) to assist in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and (iii) to support the process of the democratisation of Sudan.

As you can see, this mandate covers virtually all the important challenges currently facing Sudan. For this reason, to honour our present and earlier mandates, we have spent the greater part of

the past 21 months here in Sudan, having had virtually to defer all our other engagements in our own countries.

You may ask why I have told you all this.

I thought this might be important in order to communicate what I believe is an important message. That message is that your Continent, Africa, and its premier organisation, the African Union, are deeply concerned to do everything possible to assist the sister people of Sudan to address the challenges I have mentioned.

As a token of its seriousness in this regard, the AU did what it had never done before and appointed three former Heads of State to act as its Task Force to help resolve what the Union views as matters that are of critical importance to the future of our Continent.

I speak to you today on the eve of that historic day on which the destiny of southern Sudan, and its people, will be settled. This is a day for which your parents and grandparents strived and longed, a day which is the culmination of a long struggle, and equally the fulfillment of a momentous peace agreement.

I speak to you today as a fellow African, who has had the privilege of witnessing many African countries exercise their right of self-determination, and seen many nations emerge from conflict into peace and from repression into a democratic dawn.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which was the crowning achievement of the SPLM/SPLA following its twenty-one long years of armed struggle, will reach its point of culmination in the next few days. When the late Dr. John Garang de Mabior, Chairman of the SPLM, and Vice President Ali Osman Taha signed

that historic accord, many skeptical voices were raised. Some argued that the agreement was no more than a truce and that the war was sure to resume, others claimed that northern Sudan would never allow it to be implemented, or that the southern Sudanese would never be able to establish their own government.

Six years after the CPA was signed in Nairobi, the naysayers have been confounded. The referendum on self-determination for the people of southern Sudan is being held. It is being held on time, following a credible exercise of registration and a campaign in which the case for unity and the case for secession were both articulated.

This represents the faithful implementation of the central provisions of the CPA, and I extend my congratulations to the people of Sudan and their leaders for this formidable achievement.

Despite the national tragedy and setback that occurred with the untimely death of Dr. John Garang, the leaders and people of southern Sudan have demonstrated a unity of purpose in steering southern Sudan to the point at which you stand today.

I congratulate President Salva Kiir Mayardit on his leadership of all the communities of southern Sudan. He assumed the Presidency of the Government of Southern Sudan at a difficult moment, and rose to the occasion.

Over the last five and a half years President Salva Kiir has exercised exemplary leadership. He has provided stability and has been a powerful force for unifying the peoples of southern Sudan, helping to heal the wounds of the past. Tomorrow also marks the

fifth anniversary of the Juba Agreement between the SPLA and the South Sudan Defence Forces, also a historic achievement that provided the secure foundation for unity and integration among the southern Sudanese political forces. There is no finer person to be in charge of the destiny of southern Sudan at this moment in its history.

Equally, I congratulate President Omar Hassan al Bashir for his national leadership, and especially for having stood firm in his commitment to the CPA while facing exceptional challenges. Achieving and consolidating peace requires a partnership between former adversaries, and President Bashir has been such a partner. The speech he made here in Juba three days ago signifies the commitment of him and his government to the referendum and its outcome.

At this time, we must remember all those who perished in the struggle, and who did not live to see peace, or the people's exercise of their democratic rights including the right of self-determination. We should pause for a moment in tribute to the legacy of those uncounted numbers of Sudanese citizens who died in the war, who perished from hunger or disease, or who were driven from their homes and never lived to see their beloved country at peace.

First among those patriots who never lived to see this day is Dr. John Garang de Mabior, hero of the liberation struggle, Chairman of the SPLM and Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA, all-too-briefly First Vice President of Sudan and President of the Government of Southern Sudan.

I ask you now to stand in silence for one minute in tribute.

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Fellow Africans,

Just two days before the people of southern Sudan have the historic opportunity to vote in the referendum, we can look back at how much has been achieved, and also look at the challenges that lie ahead.

This southern Sudan, this land beyond the rivers, this land of exceptional history and promise, holds a special place in our hearts. No people on the continent of Africa have fought longer and harder for their rights, or spent longer wandering in the wilderness. None have suffered more. Today, Africa celebrates with you as you stand on the brink of exercising the right of self-determination, a right that has defined the African experience for a century.

The people of southern Sudan were among the fiercest and most determined resisters of imperial conquest. Southern Sudan was one of the least hospitable places for the invader.

We must recall great African patriots such as Mayen Mathiang, the Prophet Ngundeng, King Akwei of the Anuak, and King Gbudwe Basingbe of the Zande, who bravely resisted the invader. We must recall those who fought on into 1920s, men such as Ariendit of the Malwal Dinka, Kon Anok of the Aliab, and Gwek Ngundeng.

Even before the colonizer could claim control over this land of southern Sudan, the White Flag League was founded from within the ranks of that same colonial state. As the history books record, it was a southern Sudanese, Ali Abdel Latif, who in 1922 wrote an

article calling for the right of self-determination for all the peoples of the Nile Valley. Two years later he was one of the founders of the first secular nationalist movement in Sudan. Ali Abdel Latif correctly recognized that if the Sudanese fought their occupier tribe by tribe, they were certain to be defeated, and that in order for them to achieve their rights in the modern world, the broadest possible unity was necessary.

It was only in 1930 that the British considered that southern Sudanese territory had properly been conquered. But the spirit of patriotism remained unvanquished among the people.

People of Southern Sudan,

One of the consequences of this proud tradition of resistance was that southern Sudan was, fifty years ago, one of the least developed corners of this continent. It had the least infrastructure, the lowest levels of education, and most rudimentary forms of administration. When, in January 1953, the Sudanese and Egyptian political leaders agreed with the British on the Sudan's right of self-determination, no single southern Sudanese leader participated. When Sudan made the transition from colonial administration to self-government, just a handful of the 800 administrative positions available were awarded to southerners. When Sudan achieved its independence on 1 January 1956, the southern Sudanese members of the national assembly were unable to enforce the government's commitment to a federal system that took southern concerns into account.

This was the disastrous legacy of colonialism in Sudan. It bequeathed an independent Sudan that had yet to overcome extreme internal inequalities and divisions, which had yet to

resolve the question of whether it was an African or an Arab nation.

And tragically, because of the succession of wars that have ravaged southern Sudan since the eve of Sudanese independence, that extreme neglect has yet to be overcome. The challenge facing southern Sudan in the years ahead, is for the people of southern Sudan to achieve development, education, and fair and efficient public administration.

The beginning point for achieving these goals is not a blueprint drafted by foreign experts, it is the intrinsic sense of self-value held by the people themselves.

The central meaning of self-determination is to be able to achieve self-respect, to have the freedom to practice one's own culture and faith, to walk tall in the world.

Like other parts of our continent, southern Sudan was subjected to occupation and subjugation, its religions, its cultures and its history denigrated. The names of pre-colonial leaders of southern Sudan are too rarely taught to our children, the heroes of resistance are yet to be given their due with public memorials and ceremonies, the great poets and singers and dancers are too rarely recognized as cultural icons.

I notice that even today, many writers about southern Sudan casually refer to the traditional faiths of the people as "animist", that is, as people who worship the spirits that they suppose to reside in inanimate objects. This labeling is an act of laziness and disrespect. The traditional religions of southern Sudan have been intensively studied by scholars, many of them from among the southern Sudanese people themselves. For example, the faith of

the Dinka people, is better described as “theistic”, believing in a single omnipotent Deity, with other subordinate spirits such as sanctified ancestors. I note that the 1973 Constitution of Sudan, placed “Noble Spiritual Beliefs” in a position of parity alongside Islam and Christianity.

The Noble Spiritual Beliefs of the peoples of southern Sudan, reflect a great and complex civilization. This civilization may have produced only a few famous works of architecture, such as the pyramid of the Prophet Ngundeng, which I understand is now being restored. This civilization might have produced just a few works of written literature or recorded music and song, though I am happy that poetry and songs are now being transcribed and recorded.

However, the spiritual and social values contained in these noble faiths, are a repository of our collective identity and our common heritage. These social orders and value systems provided for social solidarity and a safety net in times of scarcity, they provided for a check on authority, for the means of collective self-defence, and for great works of art, in music, language and dance.

One of the tasks of southern Sudanese in the years ahead is to reclaim this heritage and to re-assert this identity.

Our continent-wide African struggle for self-determination, waged throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reaching its apex in the 1950s and '60s, was, at its core, the demand for dignity and respect. Our leaders were determined to create the conditions for self-fulfillment: language, culture, wellbeing, to affirm identity and to become master of one's own destiny.



However you choose to vote in the coming few days, that dignity and respect have already been achieved. Since the CPA, never again, can the people of southern Sudan ever be denied the profound freedoms of everyday life, the freedom to practice their own culture in all its richness and diversity.

Fellow Africans,

The struggle for self-determination, is also a struggle for self-rule. Here in southern Sudan, as elsewhere in Africa, it was a struggle against political repression, a fight against any form of rule other than that freely chosen by the people themselves.

Whether the choice is unity with northern Sudan or secession to form an independent state, since the CPA, the southern Sudanese have become the rulers in their own land. This cannot be taken away. This right has been won through one of the harshest struggles of the modern era, through the blood of the people, and through the peace agreement, in which the former enemies, unvanquished, agreed in their wisdom to bring the fighting to an end and to let the people decide, freely and fairly, the future of this country.

The people of southern Sudan have proved, without a shadow of doubt, that they can never again be ruled against their will.

In this week's referendum on self-determination, the decision over which form of self-rule, passes to the people and their exercise in democratic choice. For the last six years, the interim arrangements of the CPA have been guaranteed by Africa and the international community. Hereafter, the sovereign status of southern Sudan is the free decision of the people, and in turn should that decision be independence, southern Sudan will be

afforded all the guarantees of its sovereignty available in international law.

People of southern Sudan,

A third component of Africa's struggle for self-determination is to create conditions for us as Africans to come together, to overcome the arbitrary divisions imposed by the colonizer, to build our common strength, so that we are free in order to be one.

Southern Sudan is exercising self-determination today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When the previous generation of African leaders won their independence, in the middle of the last century, they had to establish from scratch the architecture of cooperation and integration, under extremely adverse international circumstances of the Cold War and continuing meddling by the former colonial powers. Repeatedly, African countries achieved the status of sovereign entities, with their national flags and seats at the United Nations and OAU, but their aspirations to genuine independence were undermined by their poverty, their economies built around providing cheap raw materials to the metropolitan powers, and by the readiness of the western and eastern blocs to intervene to prop up undemocratic rulers who served their interests. Africa may have been free in name, but too often it was free only in name. In the words of Oginga Odinga, "Not yet Uhuru."

Fifty years ago last month, the Algerian people won the right of self-determination after an extraordinarily bloody war of liberation against the colonial power. On winning that right, the FLN leader, Ahmed Ben Bella, spoke of the need for an African blood bank as a tangible expression of solidarity with the

continuing struggle of African peoples to be free. The significance of the African blood bank was that a wounded fighter from South Africa might be infused with the blood of a volunteer from Algeria, or a patriot from Sudan, injured on the battlefield, might be restored with the donated blood of a Ghanaian. Ben Bella's point was not only that Africans must stand together in their common liberation struggle, but that Africans from Morocco to Mozambique, and indeed from Martinique to Mauritius, share the same blood.

This was a struggle to enable people who had been artificially divided by colonial boundaries, to reunite. Here in Sudan there are many obvious cases: the Nubians divided between Egypt and Sudan, the Acholi between Uganda and Sudan, the Zande between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. In each of these and many other cases, the people have a much longer history of inhabiting the land than the colonial states. The people, of course, never fully respected these imposed borders. One of the aims of the architects of independence was to dismantle these frontiers and enable the people to move and interact freely.

The great Kwame Nkrumah, on the fateful night of Ghanaian independence in 1957, watched as the British Union Jack was lowered and the Ghanaian flag was raised in its place, and cried "free at last! Free at last!" On winning the political kingdom that was Ghana's independence, Nkrumah immediately stated that one African nation cannot truly be free unless all are free.

Although Nkrumah's goal of the complete political unity of Africa was not achieved, no sooner had African states achieved their independence than they came together to form the Organisation of African Unity. The OAU's singular achievement was to provide

a single focal point for the continent's collective aspiration for unity in independence.

The Liberation Committee of the OAU, based in Dar es Salaam, was the most tangible expression of Africa's common demand for self-determination, seen in the most immediate sense as freedom from colonial rule. Africa was united in supporting the liberation struggles of southern Africa, fighting and defeating colonial and racist rule in Angola and Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and finally in South Africa itself.

Free African nations made huge sacrifices for the freedom of other Africans, as yet unfree. Independent African countries of extremely diverse political orientations were united in this goal. The depth of this commitment is a testament to the spirit of unity in Africa, and the profound link that exists between self-determination and continental unity.

And this was one of the great, if neglected, themes of Dr. John Garang's leadership. He was of course a student in Dar es Salaam, at a time when the presence and influence of the African liberation struggle was at its zenith. He welcomed into the ranks of the SPLA, freedom fighters from many different countries, and spoke of forming a Pan-African Brigade within the ranks of the Movement. Dr. John's vision of the New Sudan was, in part, as a stepping stone to a new Africa, in which the work of liberation was continued to achieve the goal of the genuine emancipation of the African people and the transformation of the entire continent.

With the continent's efforts focused on completing decolonization and the defeat of Apartheid, during the first decades of independence, the goal of further, deeper continental unity was not achieved. But it was not forgotten.

The fundamental reality is that Africa is weak and poor because we are divided.

Successive African leaders have tried to overcome this history of division, in both the economic and political spheres. The Lagos Plan of Action was one of the earlier efforts at continental economic integration, and NEPAD one of the more recent.

Today, subregional organizations such as ECOWAS and the East African Community, have been in the lead in forging both economic and political integration. Step by step, we are moving towards the goal of a single African citizenship.

With respect to Sudan, African solidarity was expressed through practical politics. Neighbouring countries hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan's wars. Communities and governments provided land, shared basic resources and services, and directed international aid towards refugees. The financial cost of this assistance has gone largely unmeasured, but its significance is as great as, or greater than, the aid channeled through international organizations.

Equally notably, it was IGAD that conceived and nurtured the agenda of self-determination as a right for the people of southern Sudan and as the central component in a resolution of the Sudanese crisis. The 1994 IGAD Declaration of Principles served as the foundational document for the Machakos Protocol of 2002 and ultimately the CPA itself.

We should not forget this fact: at the very darkest hour of the war in southern Sudan, when the end of the struggle seemed at its most remote, when the people were most divided and

demoralized, it was Sudan's African neighbours, acting in a spirit of collective solidarity, that identified the foundation stone of a future settlement. And for eight long years, despite their own disagreements, and despite the bitter fallout from the Eritrean experience of self-determination, those countries did not waver in their commitment.

Let me repeat: it was African nations, acting on the basis of the African experience that placed self-determination on the agenda of Sudan's peace process. In just two day's time, the people of southern Sudan will exercise that right, and they will do so in the African tradition.

The southern Sudanese people, whatever is their choice in the vote about to be held, will emerge as true contributors to the emancipation and transformation of our continent. The self-determination of the southern Sudanese people is a cause for celebration across Africa, and an opportunity for Africa's advancement.

Fellow Africans,

Southern Sudan is exercising self-determination today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a renewed Africa and a transformed global environment. Should the people of southern Sudan choose independence, they will be able to learn from the accumulated experience of the last fifty years, and benefit from the institutions established to protect Africa's interests and promote Africa's development.

When the first democratically elected President of my country, South Africa, Nelson Mandela, made his victory speech, he echoed the words of Nkrumah, "We can loudly proclaim from the

rooftops: Free at last!" At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, having cast off the shackles of the Cold War, we reached for a real freedom to determine our destiny for ourselves.

In South Africa, struggle was particularly long and difficult but this had the benefit that we won our freedom some thirty years after the majority of African countries. We were able to reflect upon the experience of those who had already trodden the path of self-determination. We could avoid their errors, and build upon their successes. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Africa had constructed for itself the foundations for the economic, social, cultural and political integration of the continent. This process culminated with the establishment of the African Union in 2002.

Today there are institutions and opportunities for cooperation and integration that did not exist in the past. Those institutions must be supported, those opportunities must be grasped.

The circumstances of southern Sudan, whether you choose to remain as part of a united Sudan or choose separation, oblige you to establish special relations with all of your neighbours. And for reasons of the special historical relationship, and continuing political, economic and social interdependence, it will be necessary to nurture relations with northern Sudan. In the case of secession, the border between northern and southern Sudan will become Africa's longest international border.

I do not need to remind you that southern Sudan lies at a geographical position adjacent to vast areas of the African continent that have been prone to conflict, including the Horn, the Great Lakes, and central Africa. Increasingly, it is African institutions that are taking the lead in managing and resolving any conflicts that may arise in these locations. Southern Sudan's

foreign policy will, of necessity, require close working relationships with these institutions.

The practical contingencies of politics will, without doubt, push southern Sudan into the embrace of the African region.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is as clear as ever that if Africa is to rise and meet the aspirations of its people, it must unite, but that such a unity must take the form of a true economic and social integration, upon which base we can build political unity.

Brothers and sisters of southern Sudan,

The struggle of self-determination is also a struggle for democracy and equality. The exercise of national self-determination, through a popular vote on whether to establish a new state, is a vital step, but it is not the only step. It is when all citizens in a state, regardless of colour, race, ethnic origin or gender, can claim equal rights, that freedom has truly been achieved.

Sudan has always been a multi-ethnic African state, and should it divide into two countries, it will divide into two diverse, multi-ethnic African states. Some writers on Sudan have spoken of an "African" south and an "Arab" north. Let us be clear that both southern and northern Sudan are *equally African*. Some of the citizens of Sudan speak Arabic as their native language and can trace their genealogies to Arab countries, but this does not make them any less African than any other Sudanese. They are African Arabs. Indeed, from its earliest days the SPLM acknowledged, with regard to Arab identity and language, that "this aspect of our reality is immutable."



In this regard, it is important that even in the case that southern Sudan secedes, the southern Sudanese should recognize that the northern Sudanese who live among them as their brethren and fellow citizens. As a modern state, we expect that southern Sudan will not build its identity based on colour, race, or faith, and will recognize that those African Arabs who live here in southern Sudan are equally southern Sudanese.

When the SPLM was fighting its long war, it espoused the twin principles of self-determination for southern Sudan, and building a New Sudan based on the equality of all citizens. The two principles are not incompatible, indeed they are necessary complements to one another. Should the vote on self-determination be in favour of secession, this will surely reflect the sentiments of the southern Sudanese that they did not enjoy equal status within a united Sudan. The solution to any such discrimination, on the basis of race or religion, is not to establish a new state that upholds a different and reverse hierarchy of discrimination. Rather it is to establish a state in which no such discrimination can be allowed to exist.

It is understandable that Sudanese of northern origin, who are living here in southern Sudan, should feel anxious at this time. I am encouraged by the reassurances given by the leadership of southern Sudan, that southern Sudan will be run on the basis of equal citizenship rights, and that all northern Sudanese must be respected and protected. I am confident that the southern Sudanese will take the exhortation to heart, and make a special effort to allay the fears of any northerners living among them.

Equally, I am confident that, in the case of the secession of the south, northern Sudan will also embrace its diverse identity as an African nation. Those SPLM members who are citizens of northern

Sudan will continue to be able to participate in the politics of their country, pursuing their political objectives through peaceful and democratic means in common with other citizens of that country.

Brothers and sisters from southern Sudan,

In the negotiations on post-referendum arrangements, the leaders in Juba and Khartoum have agreed that, in the event of secession, they will build their policies on the overriding principle of “two viable states.”

This commitment to “two viable states” has political, security, economic and social dimensions. It is deeper than a promise to respect one another’s sovereignty. It requires ongoing cooperation in all those fields, building a special relationship across what will be the longest international border on this continent. This border should be a “soft border”, allowing the people who live adjacent to the border, or whose livelihoods depend upon crossing the border, to continue their lives with minimal disruption.

One of the distinguishing features of Sudanese national identity has been its openness to immigration, its readiness to welcome people from all corners of the African continent. Sudan has truly been a melting pot of diverse identities. In this context, the commitment to two viable states must be seen as a commitment to two viable *Sudanese* states, each of them distinguished by this commitment to pluralism and diversity, and to openness to the entire African continent, including of course one another.

I am encouraged that the leadership of southern Sudan is determined to maintain a special relationship with northern Sudan, seeing the possibility of a vote for secession as a chance

to re-set this relationship on the basis of equality. The aftermath of the referendum will be an opportunity for the northern and southern Sudanese to know each other better, to reconcile and overcome the difficult legacies of the past, and to forge closer and more durable relationships.

Within southern Sudan, the days and months following the historic exercise of the right of self-determination will be a time for healing, for reconciliation and for building a new, inclusive and democratic southern Sudan. It will be a moment for recognizing that freedom is indivisible, that southern Sudanese freedom requires northern Sudanese freedom, and indeed the coming together of the whole African continent.

Six years after he attended the celebrations for Ghana's independence, the great African-American campaigner for civil rights, the Reverend Martin Luther King, finally won true civic equality for all American citizens, and stood on the steps of the memorial to President Abraham Lincoln, the man who had emancipated the American slaves a century earlier. King's speech is famous for the words, "I have a dream," and ended with the proclamation that justice and freedom would be achieved when, "when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

The historic referendum that takes place here starting on 9 January, in which you all have a chance to vote, marks the true emancipation of the people of southern Sudan. Whether the people vote for unity or for secession, the act of choosing is itself the act of significance. What is decided hereafter is decided by the free will of the people.

The work of freedom, however, is just at its beginning. I am confident that the southern Sudanese people have the strength and spirit to succeed in that endeavour. I am confident that the leaders of southern Sudan have the determination and capacity to take their people forward, as a true and valued partner among the nations of Africa, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The work of freedom includes building the institutions for the nation. It includes establishing the policies, setting the budgets, and implementing the many programmes needed to ensure that southern Sudan can live up to the potential of its people. The work of freedom includes establishing cooperative and mutually beneficial relations with each neighbouring country and with the international community.

I am very happy that the University of Juba and the southern Sudan civil society coalition have given me this opportunity to speak to you, including the young people of southern Sudan, at this critical point in the history of this nation.

As Africans we know that the future of Sudan, both south and north, is our future. As Sudanese, both southerners and northerners, you must know that Africa stands and will stand with you regardless of the political season, and that our solidarity and friendship are unconditional.

As Africans we know that whatever the challenges of the moment, Sudan will achieve peace with itself and friendship among all its people, which peace and friendship will draw the Sudanese people, their neighbours and all Africa, ever closer together.

We, who represent an older generation, which has made its own mistakes and its own contribution to a better Africa, count on you, the youth of Africa, to discover and carry out your own mission, which would surely contain the objective to achieve the renaissance both of Sudan, whether one country or two, and your mother Continent, Africa.

Thank you.